



## **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

April 13, 2016

4600 Giant Springs Road  
Great Falls MT 59405  
(406) 454-5840

Dear Interested Citizen:

Attached to this letter you will find the Decision Notice for a Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) addressing a proposal to convert the non-native vegetative structure of a thirty-three acre field on the Marias River Wildlife Management Area to a more productive, native vegetative structure. The full title of that EA is "Marias River Wildlife Management Area Crested Wheat Field Conversion". This conversion is expected to enhance habitat and hunting opportunities for upland game birds on the WMA as well as return the soil and vegetative qualities back to a healthier resemblance of that historically known to occur in the area.

This Decision Notice is available for review in Helena at FWP's Headquarters, the State Library and the Environmental Quality Council. It also may be obtained from the Region 4 FWP Headquarters or viewed on FWP's Internet website at <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("Recent Public Notices").

In consideration of the Draft EA and the Decision Notice, I am pleased to recommend that this project be implemented as proposed.

Sincerely,

Gary Bertellotti  
Regional Supervisor

/pf  
Enclosure



**Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks**

## **DECISION NOTICE**

### **for Marias River Wildlife Management Area Crested Wheat Field Conversion**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Region 4  
4600 Giant Springs Road  
Great Falls MT 59405  
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#### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks proposes to convert the non-native vegetative structure of a 33-acre field on the Marias River Wildlife Management Area to a more-native vegetative structure. Approximately 18.5 acres of the field lies on land administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The project will be initiated in mid-April of 2016 and completed the summer of 2022. Actions include annual treatments of herbicide, the planting of a small grain crop with a no-till drill, leaving a small grain crop un-harvested for one year, and the planting of a 90% native plant seed mix with a no-till drill.

#### **ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

##### **1) PROPOSED ACTION**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) proposes to convert the non-native vegetative structure of a thirty-three acre field on the Marias River Wildlife Management Area. The proposed project would be initiated this April and completed by the fall of 2022; methods include using contemporary farming practices and herbicide application to kill out and replace the existing crested wheatgrass. The conversion aims to return the soil and vegetation composition back to a healthier resemblance of the area in historical times.

##### **2) NO ACTION**

FWP would foreclose its plans to convert the existing crested wheatgrass field, including those acres of the field on BLM-owned lands. The field's current vegetative structure would remain as it presently exists and no alterations in habitat quality, hunting opportunities or ecosystem health would ensue.

#### **PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENTS**

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on March 21, 2016.

Public comments on the proposed action were taken for 21 days (through 5 p.m. on April 11, 2016). News Releases were sent to the Great Falls Tribune, Conrad Independent Observer, Shelby Promoter, Cut Bank Pioneer Press and the Valerian newspapers. The EA was also posted on the FWP webpage <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/> beginning March 21. Copies of the EA or electronic notification of its availability were available to interested parties and adjacent landowners.

The Bureau of Land Management, following this notice, is expected to prepare similar environmental review documentation. By agreement, FWP will assume management responsibility under the authorization of the Bureau of Land Management.

## **SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT**

FWP received two written comments; all were received electronically, and both offered support for the project. Comments were in favor of the expected positive impacts to upland game birds, upland game bird habitat and improved hunting opportunities on the WMA. The two comments are listed below; no responses were made.

*Comment: This project will be a great benefit to wildlife and recreationists who use the area. I'm totally supportive of re-establishing native species in these situations.*

*Comment: I live near Denton ,....in 2001 I started with a major wildlife rehab project on my 1000 acre farm. A major part of the project included the planting of some 200 acres of new grass. In the first season of bird hunting we harvested 12 roosters....for last 4 years we have averaged close to 300 roosters each yr. I can support your plan to replace crested wheat with a mixture of both native and non native grasses to benefit the wildlife, song and game birds as well. Our local Pheasants Forever chapter has done similar work on their two major pieces of land.(wolf creek, and coffee creek projects). This investment will provide years of good food source as well as cover for the birds and wildlife.*

## **DECISION NOTICE**

Based on the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. By this Decision Notice, the unaltered Draft EA is hereby made the Final EA.

The Final EA may be viewed on MFWP's website, or obtained upon request from MFWP's Region 4 Headquarters.

April 13, 2016



Gary Bertellotti  
Region 4 Supervisor  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

